

O'Keefe, Akoond of Swat.

WRITTEN FOR THE EVENING STAR BY WM. HAMILTON OSBORNE.

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CHAPTER XIV—Continued.

But O'Keefe, as they supposed him to be, or Constitutional Smith, as he really was, had other fish to fry. For as he neared the shore, a portion of this thin, black cloud descended upon him and upon his oarsman, and in a thick black covering of mosquitoes—plain, old-fashioned Jersey mosquitoes, nothing else. Immediately they, too, set up a yelling. They, too, commenced to beat their hands and breasts and faces.

"Mosquitoes!" yelled Smith. "Good Lord, let's get out of this!"

But a half dozen men rushed into the water, and placing into the hands of Smith and his men some fresh green boughs, they dragged the boat upon the beach.

"Oh Keefe," they cried, patting him upon the back. "Oh Keefe."

And then Smith observed a phenomenon.

He noted that the instant the green bough was placed in his hand the mosquitoes deserted him. Not altogether, for now and then one braver than the rest would swoop down upon him and Smith would find it necessary to make a vicious dive with his hand every other second.

Smith, however, noted that the men all about him were engaged in doing nothing more or less than waving the green boughs and killing stray mosquitoes.

Smith and his men were covered with bites. One of the natives, however, crushed a few of the green, tender leaves in his hand and rubbed them upon the affected spots. The relief was immediate.

Smith, of course, did not understand the language of these men, but he did recognize two words—"O'Keefe" and "Swat."

And he knew that for the present time he was in good hands, save when the mosquitoes became unusually fierce.

He examined one or two of these mosquitoes and found them in every way of the same kind as the American variety. But there was one distinguished feature—they were much smaller, and more voracious, too.

The inhabitants were noisy. But even when their mouths were full, Smith's ears were assailed with the constant swish and slap of hands against faces, breasts and sides.

"Swat, swat, swat," said Smith to himself, "that's all I seem to hear." Suddenly he smote his thigh.

"By George, I've got it!" he suddenly exclaimed. "Swat, that's how they named the place—D-d if it ain't."

Smith was right. The derivation of names is usually an unknown quantity. In this case it was very simple. The island upon which Smith had landed had ever been a home of the mosquito. The inhabitants naturally were compelled constantly to slap and slap and slap. The sound which they made was swat, swat, swat. Now some sounds are difficult to express in English language. But Charles Reade in a bit of fiction called "The Box Tunnel," has written into the mouth of a character the sound that is made by a masculine feminine kiss. He says that that sound in plain English is nothing else than "Pweep." Perhaps he is right, though the sound varies according to temperament and ardor. But he, and he alone, has turned it into a written word.

But the sound made by the open hand coming into contact with any other portion of the human body (except when administered in the form of a slap to mothers; in which case it may be called "Whack") is always the same. It is plain swat. It is swat. It is swat. The English as it does in Choctaw. The people of Swat, having from time immemorial been bothered by mosquitoes and having always been obliged to slap and slap and slap, gradually became to be known as the people of Swat. And Smith had discovered it, and he was exclaiming to his name, and Swat's their nature, too.

But there is ever a compensative element in nature. For while the swat of the wind to the shore lamb, in marshes reeking with malaria germ and malaria he has played the plant that you have heard of—vine—the thing that makes malaria. In the island of Swat, swept as it was by the larger germs, mosquitoes, he had placed an antidote. The swat of the wind, the green trees from which the boughs used by the natives had been torn. Like cures like. The island of Swat was a land of mosquitoes, but it was a land of swat, too. That, but the mosquitoes, always just a little ahead of the game, as they had given rise to the name of Swat.

Later Constitutional Smith had time to revolve all these curious things in his mind. In the meantime, however, he was busy with the things at hand.

Smith found that the more prosperous in the island kept their bodies covered with the mosquito season. He, therefore, was able without comment to keep his tattoo marks, and the sticking plaster which still covered them spots well hidden. O'Keefe had been there in the winter season. As he left, it will be remembered, he, too, had been bitten. The swat of the wind, the blinger of spring. Smith had arrived in the height of the summer season.

He found himself socially and politically a lion. And there were still vague whispers in the air that sounded like "Oh Keefe—Akoond." These whispers grew into a murmur, and then, as the sun went down, they were crying again and loud, "Oh Keefe. Akoond of Swat!"

It was the tribute of savagery to civilization. That is the way of the world. A man who had taught them to enjoy life, how to work and how to play. They were stupid, but they were appreciative.

The Akoond was all too pleased with this disposition on the part of his people. He had disposed of the mosquitoes for months ago. He would only be too glad to do it in public. He strutted about with a smile of triumph on his face. He was a man, he said, the followers of Oh Keefe. He urged that Oh Keefe become a candidate. He was magnanimous, even to the point of conceding the election to the field to "root" and howl for Oh Keefe. And they roared and howled to their heart's content, and so did everybody else.

Constitutional Smith soon understood the situation. He acquiesced. He said he would run. He did not care how soon. Neither did the Akoond. The Akoond did not even prepare himself as he had been wont to do.

But the thing was arranged and a day was set. This time, though, the Akoond, O'Keefe's day had surely come. This time it was just as well, perhaps, to make things complete. The Akoond was a fair man, but his rival had become persistent. This time he would kill him and have done with it. It was easy enough. Then there would be an end to this vague unrest.

Constitutional Smith spent his time in the interim in looking for gold. He did not find any. He found nothing—noting at all, but a superabundance of this fresh green vegetation that seemed death to the mosquitoes. And he found marsh after marsh which was life to the mosquitoes. And he found nothing else.

But Smith did not repine. He did not rail at O'Keefe. He knew that O'Keefe had done his best. He knew that O'Keefe had fact himself. There were worse things than being upon the Isle of Swat, and for the time being he was content. He loafed and lived, and for the present that would do.

He almost forgot about the great battle that was to take place. One day he heard a number of shouts in the village, and he saw men scurrying in every direction. He was sitting under a tree.

"Oh Keefe! Oh Keefe!" they shouted. "Oh Keefe!" Then one of them saw him as he stood up, and ran towards him, and dragged him towards the village, shouting, probably that Oh Keefe was found. Smith entered the village, and found that the army was drawn up about a spacious ring.

On one side of this ring stood the Akoond, putting out his black chest. Smith made an apology for not being on hand, which was probably understood by the Akoond, for he waved his hand in a gracious manner. Smith, cautious as he was, and as lazy as he seemed to be, did not take the trouble to rid himself of his superfluous clothing. He stepped into the ring, and glanced curiously at the Akoond and then at the assembled guests. He nodded to two or three. Some fellow blew a blast on a horn and the Akoond stepped down upon Smith. Smith sidestepped and tapped the Akoond lightly on the shoulder as he passed. Smith spent the next few seconds in vainly endeavoring to catch a mosquito which seemed to bother him; he did not notice the Akoond.

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